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## Evaluating Student Writing

MARGARET E. NEWMAN

Evaluation of student writing was always the *bête noire* of my teaching career. A pro and con appraisal, yes—a conference to give the student some suggestion that might help him take a step toward improvement. But to put a C, D, or E on the paper when crowded time made the conference or even the careful written comment impossible took much troubled thought, and I probably often failed in effecting the very motivation I was after. Why I said I would talk on this subject is surely a mystery! Be sure to read carefully the October, 1955, *Illinois English Bulletin*, especially the samples of theme correcting and grading and the comments about the grading. All that I am saying is there!

Although I have been reading many chapters and articles in an effort to recapture my thinking about theme evaluation, I am going to give you none of the profound philosophy I found there and none of the specific techniques—just some of my own ideas that I have come to believe in through years of teaching.

Probably we should think first of the meaning of the word *evaluation*—or *appraisal*. Instead of thinking of it in terms of a letter or figure grade, let us assume that the purpose back of assigning that letter or figure to a piece of student writing is all-important; that unless the grade aids in effecting that purpose, it is a useless form. If the end-purpose of assigning a written theme is that theme, of course our evaluation can be simply a letter or figure. But our educational philosophy today is that we want to bring about desired changes in the behavioral patterns of the students we have in our classes. Are we evaluating in such a way

*As a sample of the stimulating kinds of presentation you hear at each I.A.T.E. conference, this talk presented at the 1955 meeting is printed here. Miss Newman is the retired head of the Elgin High School English Department, and was formerly associate editor of the Bulletin.*

that the student will respond and grow, even a slow step at a time, or are we setting positive standards that must be met, and punishing—defeating—the student if he does not meet them? Is our emphasis on child growth and development or on a cold, lifeless product?

We are all familiar with the emphasis on the child himself and his growth when he is in elementary school and even in junior high. In those formative years great care is needed that direction and guidance be an aid and not a deterrent in bringing about desired behavioral changes. It is there that the greater shifts have come in the way this is done as we learn more of individual differences, of backgrounds, of attitudes, of techniques in setting challenging goals. There, too, at least in the elementary grades, less emphasis is placed on grades and more on the appraisal by comment, by analysis.

But when the child reaches high school, the teacher seems to have to accept an added responsibility and the inevitability of measuring one child's accomplishment against that of another and against a fairly inflexible standard of acceptability by the adult world. Time becomes an ogre, too, and forces us often to grade rather than appraise. At this time the purpose of the particular piece of writing can assume greater importance . . . I mean, the kind of writing assigned. Surely, it has always been considered, but only as one of many elements affecting the evaluation of the result. In high school, beginning at least in the sophomore year, a greater proportion of emphasis can be given to how correctly and effectively this particular student has fulfilled the purpose of the assignment. Has the student improved in doing this particular task?

Let us consider writing assignments a moment. No longer does a teacher believe that writing practice alone will be effective in improving various techniques. Now we know that purposeful writing will be more apt to be well done than the "write a theme for tomorrow" assignment. The writing that sends a letter to a sick teacher or classmate, that orders some free material, that makes an interview appointment, that reports a real conference or the minutes of a real class meeting will probably be better done by the poor or average student than will the writing forced out of a vacuum! It is not my topic here to discuss motivation. It had to be mentioned, however, because evaluation is so closely tied up to it.



It is easy to see how this is true. How well has the student carried out the assignment? Is it carried out understandably, clearly?—a C grade. Is it carried out “correctly” as well?—a B grade. Does it have that added something that distinguishes it from ordinary, clear, correct writing, that spark of individuality?—an A grade. When the student has said something pertinent to the subject and said it clearly, correctly, and effectively, what more can be asked? If we are grading creative writing, yes; then we must ask whether or not the writing captures and holds interest, whether it has good and original imagery, whether it contains valuable ideas. But most of our writing is done for other, more mundane purposes, where clarity, correctness, and effectiveness are enough to inform or influence the reader.

Grade alone, though, is not enough. A C, D, E (or whatever marking system is used) can have a very chilling effect on the student, so discouraging if the grade is low as to endanger the possibility of any further writing growth, so enervating if too high as to make further effort seem unnecessary. Grades alone may evaluate for the record book. They will not do much—if anything—to stimulate confidence and hence improvement in the student. This we all know.

*Real* evaluation includes the written comment; the praise for the smoothly related sentences, the nicely turned phrase, the clear organization—even just the unusually neat paper; it also includes the suggestions for improvement, specific enough to be of real help, but not flatly discouraging. I have been guilty of returning a paper spotted throughout with red marks—marks only—with perhaps just one word of comment. How much more helpful, probably, would have been my time used for a thoughtful paragraph aimed to stimulate that student and *no* red corrections!

Undoubtedly the most effective evaluating method is the conference where student and teacher have time to go over the writing together, where the student can justify his wording or his sentence fragment, and where the teacher can point out alternate choices or needed elaboration, suggest sources for helping with clarifying corrections, and give encouragement when no improvement is found or praise for even the slightest gain. Time for this kind of evaluation is seldom available, but it should be found at least two or three times each semester: once near the beginning when getting acquainted with the student's needs from his own point of view is necessary, and then as often as possible,—surely toward the end of the semester when gains can be complimented in the more effective personal way and further needs suggested. When time

is precious, even a brief appraisal of a part of each student's work while the entire class is writing may be a helpful substitute for the longer conference.

Another helpful method of evaluation is to use the students themselves. Occasionally class groups can talk over each others' papers, a committee can be appointed to submit analyses of a set of papers and further needs of the class and individuals, or a student can be asked to evaluate his own paper. He alone may know his capabilities and his needs; he alone knows the effort he has put into this particular theme. His classmates may understand him and know how to stimulate his improvement even better than does his teacher. Their words of encouragement or disappointment may have the salutary affect on his next effort that nothing the teacher could do or say would have.

One thing we should never forget when grades are used, even *with* comment, is that there is a complete understanding of the meaning of each symbol. Perhaps the class has worked out together the standards to set for average work and work which is better or lower than average. This, of course, is a democratic procedure that pays dividends when it is carefully done. Perhaps the teacher has outlined with the class what she expects in a C theme, what she considers the mark of superior work, and what she will not accept for credit. Even though the English department has a printed sheet or booklet listing minimum essentials, the students must have a clear idea of the expectations of a particular teacher. Teachers' standards do differ; teachers' emphases do differ. I'm sorry to say that we sometimes shift our own standards with our shifts in physical and emotional well-being. Our efforts are to be as objective as possible; but in something as subjective as written composition which involves our background tastes, our mood, our personal relationships, it is difficult to be objective. A well-defined standard for a particular assignment together with a knowledge of and interest in each student's progress can help the evaluation by making it more purposeful.

The desired effect of the evaluation is that the student will improve his attitudes as well as his ability to write satisfactorily. But some appraisals have the undesired effect of raising a wall between student and teacher. He says, "Oh, it's no use. There's no pleasing her," and then spends less effort on each succeeding theme. Sometimes, rather than discouraging a student, we give him a higher grade than he really deserves. But lowering standards does not help anyone. Students really like to work and appre-



ciate high standards when they understand them. They will do seemingly impossible jobs when encouragement and just rewards are given. They do not want molly-coddling, but they do not want bitter defeat either, nor the unexplained lack of the expected higher grade.

Much has been written about the evaluation of written work. Articles in our own *Illinois English Bulletin*, in the *English Journal*, in English bulletins of other states, occasionally in almost every educational magazine, and, of course, in the National Council's *The English Language Arts*: all are most helpful. I'd like to call your attention to a stimulating article in the April, 1955, *North Central Association Quarterly*. In "Changing Concepts in Evaluation" Robert Egner is not speaking of written composition specifically, but of the entire field of evaluation. His is a thought-provoking article. This and the October *Illinois English Bulletin* earlier referred to I hope you all can read.

Probably the very best guide in evaluating student writing is found in the two *Illinois English Bulletins* of March and April, 1953, in which the ninth and twelfth grade theme-evaluation projects were most carefully reported. The twenty themes for each grade (ninth grade in the March number and twelfth grade in the April) are given, each one with eleven evaluation points listed and a median grade determined; but also—and more important—there are full explanatory comments and suggestions to the student and added comments to the teacher. These bulletins can be of immense help to the beginning teacher of high school English and to all of you, no matter how long you have taught, if you read and use them constructively.

For the college teacher there are many helpful studies, but probably of greatest value is the study made within one's own department. The grading of the same set of papers by at least three teachers (better by the entire department) and then a frank and free discussion of the various grades assigned each, sets the stage for an analysis of standards and methods of helping students improve. From this study the standards set up within that department will be the same for all. Occasional re-study in terms of usefulness and emphasis will be necessary, of course, both for new staff members and for—dare I say—the reawakening of the old!

In this hasty survey I have tried to bring out some well-known points, mainly that there is no easy road to good evaluation. First, the basic purpose of evaluation is to measure the student's be-

havioral development—in our case, to measure and aid the growth of his ability to communicate in writing. Second, evaluation, to be effective, must have teacher comments, carefully worded to fit the particular student's needs. Third, self- and peer-evaluation may be as important as teacher-evaluation. Finally, standards used in evaluating must be understood by both teachers and students.

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## For Want of a Word . . .

MYRA BLOXOM

"For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the battle was lost; and for want of a battle the kingdom was lost." In considering the importance of teaching vocabulary, this common saying might be changed to read, For want of a word the sentence was lost; for want of a sentence communication was lost; for want of communication, the thought was lost to society. It is undoubtedly true that the knowledge of a large number of words and the ability to use them with precision is an asset to any individual, whether he is working on a Ph.D. or simply trying to communicate with his friends. Therefore, "teaching words is a major responsibility of the high school teacher of any subject . . . It is not an extra task superimposed on an already overloaded program; it is the heart of the teaching process."<sup>1</sup> Although teaching vocabulary is the job of every teacher, the main responsibility often falls on the teacher of English, since his specific field is the language arts.

The question has often been raised, is it really possible to teach vocabulary? A child begins learning words first through what he hears and later through what he reads. His total environment shapes his vocabulary. Is it then possible in a few weeks or a semester to compensate for factors which are lacking in a student's environment? Can any true education take place in the subject of vocabulary, or will the student remember words only long enough to write them on an examination and then forget them?

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*This article on vocabulary building was prepared in the spring of 1956, when the author was a senior at the University of Illinois.*

<sup>1</sup> Olive S. Niles, "Improving General Vocabulary," *High School Journal*, vol. 39 (December, 1955), p. 146.

Several research studies have made an attempt to answer these questions. An experiment was conducted at the University of Minnesota in an attempt to discover whether or not it was possible to enlarge the vocabulary of college students through study in class. In the experimental group, which consisted of seven sections in a three-hour course in English Composition, the students were given drills in one hundred words every week. The control section, which was matched with the experimental sections according to ability and achievement, received no training in vocabulary. The results of the experiment showed that students enlarge their vocabularies through special attention directed to that end.<sup>2</sup>

A research project which used two sections of a lower-division class in mental hygiene resulted in the following conclusions: (1) A student's vocabulary grows, regardless of whether or not he gives the matter much specific attention. (2) There is a measurable gain in vocabulary in as short a period as six weeks. (3) Students who give vocabulary specific attention may gain about twice as rapidly as those whose vocabulary growth is incidental.<sup>3</sup> It appears, then, that there is some value in teaching vocabulary. The next question is one of how to teach it.

In many schools the teacher devotes one or two weeks to the study of vocabulary and then moves on to the study of pronouns or *The Tale of Two Cities*, without giving further thought to vocabulary. In other schools the teacher devotes five or ten minutes almost every day to the study of vocabulary. Both of these methods are useful; the most effective program is a combination of the two. Beginning with a short unit on vocabulary, the students learn some valuable techniques of word study. In addition, they develop some enthusiasm for studying words; they become word-conscious. Throughout the year they continue to look for new words, to talk about them, and to make them part of their vocabulary. Thus, the interest which was developed during the unit, is sustained and the chances are good that the students will continue to be interested in words even after they have completed their course in English.

The first problem which faces the teacher who is planning his program of vocabulary building is that of motivation. How

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<sup>2</sup> Alvin C. Eurich, "Enlarging Vocabularies," *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 3 (June, 1932), p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> Harold W. Bernard, "An Experiment in Vocabulary Building," *School and Society*, vol. 53 (June 7, 1941), p. 743.



can he help his students become interested in words? Johnson O'Connor's essay, "Vocabulary and Success,"<sup>4</sup> is an excellent source of motivation for the study of words. A capable student may read the essay and report on it to the class. Using the report as a starting point, the class can discuss the advantages of having an adequate vocabulary. The students will, we hope, decide that it much better to be able to express their thoughts in words which convey their exact meaning than it is to grope for a group of vague words which at best will express their ideas inadequately. After the students see the value in studying vocabulary, they can then help plan their method of study. One teacher describes the results of such pupil-teacher planning. "In preliminary discussion and planning we had brought out the fact that vocabulary building is a lifelong process, that it is a matter of habitual interest and curiosity rather than of any one block of work. We had, also, however, decided that understanding of a few techniques would be of great benefit."<sup>5</sup>

After the plans for the study are completed and the students fully understand its purpose, the teacher should further arouse interest by giving some exercise which will provoke her students' curiosity about words. "Literature should be a means of interesting children in words. The selection of words, especially by poets, but by good prose writers as well, indicates how the precise word is effective, how much better is the poet's choice than that of the casual speaker or writer."<sup>6</sup> Students enjoy discovering for themselves new ways of looking at words they already know. Discovering meaningful parts in known words seems to be especially enjoyable if the words have always been considered unbreakable units of meanings. The following exercise<sup>7</sup> would be a good one to arouse students' interest during the early part of a unit:

What meaningful parts can you find in these words? How is the meaning of the word part related to the meaning of the whole word?

secretary

apartment

cupboard

discover

disappear

disease

<sup>4</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, CLIII (February, 1934).

<sup>5</sup> Helen F. Olson, "Affixes and Twelfth Grade Vocabulary Building," *English Journal*, Vol. 43 (January, 1954), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Virgil E. Herrick and Leland B. Jacobs, *Children and the Language Arts* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1955), p. 334.

<sup>7</sup> Laura Dunklin, "Developing Word Mastery," *High School Journal*, vol. 39 (January, 1956), p. 335.



Many teachers are concerned with the problem of what words to teach. The best known list of words is the Thorndike list.<sup>8</sup> One teacher feels that "one of the most popular and rewarding vocabulary units is an intensive story of 500 important words which are found infrequently in the average college freshman's vocabulary but which occur with great frequency in mature, adult reading." She, therefore, based her unit on a list of these words compiled by Norman Lewis.<sup>9</sup> However, some research which was conducted by sending out questionnaires to a large number of successful teachers resulted in the conclusion that the use of any word list is ineffective. Standard word lists were used the least by all teachers and were rated by the greatest percentage of persons as being a non-effective source.<sup>10</sup> There seems to be little value in presenting to students a list of words which appear useless to them. A much better system is to let students find words which they do not understand in their own reading. One possible source for words to study is the newspaper. "A sixth-term class in the Girls' Commercial High School observed the *New York Times* and the *New York World* for one week. Every day a report was made by committees in charge of special sections in the papers, each committee submitting to a filing clerk a list of unusual words . . . Each day a short list was put on the board and discussed . . . The practical result was the conclusion that the daily press is a good source of widening one's vocabulary."<sup>11</sup> If vocabulary is taught nearly every day, the students can pick out words from the literature they are studying and present them to the class or keep a personal record. If students are on the look-out for new words in their reading for all classes and in outside work, they will soon develop a vocabulary list which is much more meaningful to them than any standard list could possibly be. And, after all, learning a particular list of words should not be the real objective of vocabulary study. The important thing is that the students learn a method of attacking new words which will help them long after they have completed high school English.

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<sup>8</sup> Edward L. Thorndike and Irving Large, *The Teacher's Word Book of 30,000 Words* (N. Y.: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1944).

<sup>9</sup> Sister Mary Brian, "Developing a Reading Vocabulary," *The Catholic Educational Review*, vol. 52 (January, 1954), p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Martha L. Addy, "Development of a Meaning Vocabulary in the Intermediate Grades," *Elementary English*, vol. 18 (January, 1941), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> "Using the Newspapers to Increase Vocabulary," *High Points*, vol. 5 (September, 1923), p. 26.

If a teacher is to do a successful job in teaching vocabulary, he must consider the ways in which words are learned. Words are learned first and best through experience. It is possible in high school to do some teaching of words through direct experience. Field trips in English classes, as well as science and social studies classes, would provide a rich source of new words. Direct experience, however, is often time-consuming and impossible. Therefore, the teacher must provide other types of experience which can focus students' attention on new words. "The sound film appeals simultaneously to the eyes and the ears. Hence, it can fuse the stimuli of spoken and printed words in the description of objects and relationships."<sup>12</sup> A film or a filmstrip is most effective in vocabulary building when a list of words is presented before the showing of the film and discussed at the conclusion. Still pictures, diagrams, and charts are also good means for providing indirect experience. Records, too, can be used as an aid for vocabulary building.

Another way students learn words is through context. Most incidental vocabulary development takes place through hearing words in context. The following excerpt from the article "Improving General Vocabulary" suggests an exercise which will help students to learn words through context:

- a. Prepare a list of words, probably unfamiliar to most of the pupils. Such a list might be the following: *vendetta*, *epicene*, *protean*, *sullying*, *comport*.
- b. Ask the pupils to divide a piece of paper lengthwise into two parts. On the left side ask them to write definitions of any of these words they may know.
- c. Present sentences and ask pupils to try again to define the words with the help of the sentences. This time they write their definitions on the right side of the paper.
- d. Pupils will find that they can "guess" several of the meanings from the context. Discuss different types of clues: (1) the synonym clue, (2) the contrast clue, (3) the summary clue, (4) the experience clue, (5) the reflection of mood clue. They should also discuss the kind of a sentence where there is no safe clue.
- e. Further practice. Committees may assume the task of seeking out examples of the various kinds of clues. The

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<sup>12</sup> H. A. Gray, "Sound Films for Reading Programs," *The School Executive*, vol. 60. (February, 1941), p. 24.



teacher should watch for opportunities to discuss new words as they appear in context.<sup>13</sup>

Such an exercise allows the students to learn inductively the concept of understanding words by their context.

The most common method of teaching vocabulary is through the use of the dictionary. A vocabulary unit should include some discussion of such things as how to find words in the dictionary, how to interpret diacritical markings, how to select the meaning which fits the desired context. There are numerous exercises available to give students practice in using these techniques. Any good dictionary publishes a handbook which contains such exercises. Miss Helen Ford gives an exercise to her students which includes practice in most of the important dictionary skills.

1. Match each definition in the numbered list with the term it defines in the lettered list.
2. Here is a list of 26 words, each beginning with a different letter. Arrange these words alphabetically.
3. If the statement is true, write T after it: if it is false, write F after it.
4. Here is a list of 24 words beginning with S. Arrange them in alphabetical order.
5. Give four words for *bright* as applied to a diamond, and four words for *bright* as applied to a child of unusual intelligence.
6. Give opposites for the following words.
7. You are visiting a great cathedral. The guide uses the following terms. See whether you can find in the lettered list, a definition to fit each term in the numbered list.
8. Fill each blank with a suitable word beginning with *b*.<sup>14</sup>

Although it is important for students to be able to use the dictionary easily and efficiently, exercises involving the dictionary can be overused. Students tire quickly of looking up long lists of words, and the time they spend doing such exercises after they learn the principle involved is simply busywork. There are also some dangers in using dictionary exercises to the exclusion of other kinds of practice. One of these problems is tuning the meaning to the context. Often, students thoughtlessly copy the first meaning in the dictionary without understanding what it really means or whether or not it fits their context. Following is an exercise which will help overcome this problem:

<sup>13</sup> Niles, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Cross Ford, "Dictionary Drills," *The Instructor*, vol. 52 (May, 1943), pp. 28-9.

- a. Present sample sentences containing familiar words used in unusual contexts. Ask pupils to select dictionary definitions which fit the context.
- b. Dictate words which have multiple meanings and ask students to use them in a sentence. Tabulate the different meanings which occur in the students' sentences. Refer to the dictionary to find still more meanings.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the dictionary work can be done in class in the form of games. Much of the teaching of dictionary techniques can be given incidentally. Whenever there is any confusion about a word, the students should be encouraged to look it up. When the class is doing exercises on context, their conclusions should be checked in the dictionary. Such methods will encourage students to acquire the dictionary habit, which is, after all, the real objective of the practice.

Another method of teaching vocabulary is to study the structure of words, considering their roots and affixes. In one experiment, ten seventh-grade classes worked on a manual ten minutes a day for a month. Each lesson presented one affix or one word root. A matched group was used as a control for the experiment. Tests were given before and after the experimental teaching to determine gains in ability to interpret new words containing the studied elements, in incidental learning of spelling, in speed of visual and auditory perception, in general vocabulary, in reading comprehension and in speed of reading. A delayed recall test was given six weeks after the close of the experimental teaching to determine if the meanings of the studied prefixes and word-roots were still remembered. The conclusions were as follows: (1) Only the high mental-age group showed a significant gain in the interpretation of new words. (2) The experimental group was significantly superior to the control group in spelling. (3) Delayed recall tests showed that the experimental group was still superior after a lapse of time. (4) The low mental-age group showed gain in visual perception, less in auditory perception. (5) There was no significant improvement in general vocabulary, reading comprehension, or speed of reading.<sup>16</sup>

Another research resulted in the conclusion that the ability to recognize word-roots and affixes is correlated positively with

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<sup>15</sup> Niles, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>16</sup> Lois M. Otterman, "The Value of Teaching Prefixes and Word-Roots," *Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 48 (April, 1955), pp. 612-616.



vocabulary.<sup>17</sup> These studies seem to indicate that the study of word-roots and affixes is effective in developing vocabulary, although there is some disagreement as to the degree of effectiveness. One teacher describes her method of teaching word-roots in the following way. "Ask pupils to fill the blackboard with a 'word family.' They will quickly see how unnecessary it is to memorize individual definitions . . . The 'port' (to carry or bear) family is a very large one: *Report, deport, import, export, transport, reporter, deportation, portable, porter*, etc. Add a few more. Talk about the meaning of *re* in *report*, of *able* in *portable*, *er* in *porter*, etc. This kind of teaching has a cumulative effect. Affixes recur constantly; roots begin to combine, as in *phonograph* and *equivocation*."<sup>18</sup>

Another idea is to have each pupil keep a permanent list of prefixes, roots, and suffixes in a notebook. The pupils can decide and indicate on this list all elements which are to be memorized. The entries in this notebook could include (1) the sentence in which the word was found, (2) meanings of the element, (3) the pupil's own sentence about a real event he has known, using the word as used in the sentence, (4) the common meaning of the word as it is used in both sentences.<sup>19</sup>

Some teachers use the study of etymology as an aid to teaching vocabulary. However, the results of a survey of teacher opinion indicate that most teachers think there is little value in the study of etymology to discover the meaning of a word.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes, a knowledge of the history of a word will help students to remember its meaning; however, this method is too time-consuming to be used very frequently. Its chief value is in stimulating students' interest in words and in helping them to become aware of the constantly changing nature of our language.

Each of these methods is helpful in teaching vocabulary. There is probably no one type of lesson which is clearly superior to the others. The teacher of English should use all of the techniques, varying his approach from day to day so that the students retain continual interest in learning about words.

Along with enlarging their vocabularies, students should understand something of the affective meanings of words. Semantics is,

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<sup>17</sup> J. B. Carrol, "Knowledge of English Roots and Affixes as Related to Vocabulary and Latin Study," *Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 34 (October, 1940), p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> Niles, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>19</sup> Dunklin, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> Addy, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

therefore, integral in the study of vocabulary. "We live in a period in which discriminating listening is very important. We no longer hear occasional speeches. The ubiquitous radio bombards some of us constantly. We want children to learn to listen with some discrimination, to see the real meaning of words used by special leaders of all sorts, be they politicians, advertising men, or others. We can ask them to listen to particular programs and . . . to note words that they do not fully understand. We can discuss those words in class and list them in class or individual notebooks, just as we list other new words. We can seek opportunity to use those new words . . . This develops vocabulary, but it also develops thinking."<sup>21</sup>

The study of word connotation is usually quite interesting to students. The teacher should capitalize on the inherent interest in the subject by using a variety of techniques which can make the careful analyzation of words both worthwhile and enjoyable. "There is no better introduction to semantics than the nonsense books of Lewis Carroll. Much of this nonsense, unintelligible to young readers, depends upon verbal hair-splitting. Humpty-Dumpty put for all time the case for the opposition. 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.' How many of his descendants are continuing the tradition!"<sup>22</sup>

One of the concepts which students should learn in their brief study of semantics is that of levels of abstractions. Students, and teachers too, often think that all words mean one thing to all people. Thus, a word like "chair" refers to a definite object we all know. By the same token (they reason) the word "democracy" refers also to something definite we all know. We must point out how vastly different these words are. The image which the word "chair" calls up is similar in all our minds, but the difference in our conceptions of words like "democracy," "freedom of speech," and "Fascist" is tremendous. To use these terms we should first clarify them in our own minds, so that we may clarify them to our listeners. Otherwise, true communication is impossible. Specific and concrete terms are easily pinned down. Abstract and general terms are not. The following ladder of abstraction will help students to realize the increasing "fuzziness" as one goes up the ladder.

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<sup>21</sup> Herrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-9.

<sup>22</sup> Henry I. Christ and Joseph Bellafore, "The Semantic Approach to Vocabulary Study," *High Points*, vol. 26 (April, 1944), pp. 27-8.



human being

boy

American

New Yorker

Brooklynite

Terry Smith of Fort Hamilton High School <sup>23</sup>

Along with discussing levels of abstraction, students should talk about slanted words and propaganda techniques. They will probably enjoy looking for examples of "bandwagon" or "testimonial" in the advertisements in the daily paper, or comparing news stories of one event from several different papers. They may study each other's papers to find examples of slanted words or words which are misleading or vague. In each of these exercises, students should substitute words which are exact and objective, for words which are fuzzy and biased. Muddled words and muddled thoughts go hand in hand. Therefore, as a student develops his vocabulary and learns to use the precise word which expresses his meaning, he is also developing his ability to think clearly.

Thus, there are many methods which the teacher can use to make the study of vocabulary interesting to his students. And he should make use of all these methods if the study is to be truly "word-education," and not merely busywork involving the use of long and useless words.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

## N. C. T. E. CONVENTION

This year you'll not need to travel far to attend the Thanksgiving convention of the National Council. It will be held in the Sheraton-Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis on November 22-24. Here is the condensed program:

DATES: November 22-24, 1956

PLACE: Sheraton-Jefferson Hotel, St. Louis. (Write directly to the hotel for reservations. Rooms are also available at the Statler, 3 blocks away.)

CONVENTION THEME: "A man's reach should exceed his grasp."

### FEATURES:

#### *Thursday*

Directors' Meeting—9-12 a.m.

Committee Meetings—12:15-3 p.m.

Business Meeting—3:30-4:30 p.m.

General Session—8:00 p.m.

Chief speakers: Mrs. Luella B. Cook, president of NCTE, and Harold S. Taylor, president of Sarah Lawrence College

#### *Friday*

Three series of meetings, 30 groups in all, on these themes:  
"A Clarification of Our Goals"—9 a.m.

"Exploration of Specific Problems Confronting Us"—10:30 a.m.

"Identifying Professional Resources and Illustrating Professional Know-How"—3 p.m.

Books-for-Children Luncheon, CCCC Luncheon,  
Journalism Luncheon—12:15 p.m.

Annual Banquet—8 p.m.

Chief speakers: Wallace Stegner, Stanford University  
and Thomas Hall, Washington University



*Saturday*

PRR-Affiliates Breakfast—7:45 a.m.

Elementary Section, "Reading, a Creative Experience"—9 a.m.

Secondary Section, *The English Language Arts in the Secondary School*—9 a.m.

College Section, "Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading"—9 a.m.

Annual Luncheon—12:30 p.m.

Chief speakers: Hiram Haydn, American Book Publishers Council; Paul Engle, poet and teacher; Marion Sheridan, past president of NTCE

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# I. A. T. E. Conference

Featured speaker at the annual I.A.T.E. conference, to be held at the University of Illinois on October 19 and 20, will be Walter Havighurst of Miami University. Professor Havighurst is well known as an author of books for young people and adults, especially books about the Great Lakes region.

Blocks of rooms have been reserved at the Inman Hotel and Tilden-Hall Hotel. The Champaign-Urbana area also has a large number of excellent motels. Write directly for reservations.

The complete program is as follows:

## Friday, October 19, 1956

### Morning

- 9:00 Executive Council Meeting  
(Illinois Association of Teachers of English)

### Afternoon

- 1:00 Registration—Main Lounge, Illini Union Building
- 1:30-5:00 General Session  
Presiding: Miss Helen Stapp, Decatur High School,  
President of the Illinois Association of Teachers  
of English
- 1:30 Annual Business Meeting—Illinois Association of  
Teachers of English
- 2:00-2:45 "Metaphors in Language"  
Mrs. Marilyn Knop, student, Eastern Illinois State  
College
- 3:00-3:45 "Techniques I Have Learned in Teaching English  
to Foreign Students That Are Valuable in Teach-  
ing English to English-Speaking Students"  
Mrs. Helen Brennan, University of Illinois
- 4:00-5:00 "War and Peace"  
Dr. Donald Alter, Eastern Illinois State College
- 6:00 Dinner Meeting  
"Current Criticism of the Teaching of English in  
the Secondary Schools of Illinois"

Miss Helen Stapp, Decatur High School,  
President of the Illinois Association of  
Teachers of English  
Address: Professor Walter Havighurst, author  
and Professor of English, Miami University

**Saturday, October 20, 1956**

**Morning**

8:30 Registration—Main Lounge, Illini Union

9:00-10:00 General Session

Symposium: Presiding — Miss Margaret Adams,  
Sycamore High School

Theme: Present Trends in Teaching Reading and  
Literature

Role of Literature Today

Mrs. Charlotte Whittaker, Evanston High School

Teaching of Poetry

Dr. Charles Willard, Southern Illinois University

Spiritual Affirmations in Modern Literature

Dr. Merrilie Mather, Eastern Illinois State College

Correlation of Music, Art, and Literature

Robert Shiley, Western Illinois State College

**SECTIONAL MEETINGS**

10:15-11:15 Address on Experiments in Curriculum  
Sister Rosaleen

Criteria For Selection of Poetry and Prose to be  
Published in the English Bulletin

Dr. J. N. Hook, U. of I., chairman

Maurine Self, Jacksonville High School, Jackson-  
ville, Ill.

Paulene Yates, Maine Township High School

Guiding Student Teachers

Jack Dillon, Fairfield, Illinois

Liesette McHarry, chairman

F. James Rybak, College of Educ., U. of I.



### Specifics to Be Mastered at Each Grade Level

Louise Bach, Southern Illinois University

Elizabeth Graham, Springfield, Illinois

Wilmer Lamar, chairman, Decatur High School

### Teaching Spelling in the High School

Dr. John R. Hains, Dean of the Graduate School,  
Northern Illinois State College, chairman

Alma Happe, Rochelle High School

William R. Seat, Northern Illinois State College

### Developmental Plan of Speech Through the Four Years of High School

Kenneth Ettner, Elgin High School, chairman

Ann Russell Janes, Jacksonville High School

Bessie Seed, Lawrenceville High School

### How Are the Four Areas of English Unified?

P. E. Ford, Head, Department of English, Maine  
Township High School

Barbara Garst, Moline, Illinois

Virginia Hinchliff, Galesburg High School

Emma Mae Leonhard, Jacksonville, chairman

### Meeting the Challenge of the English-Teacher Load

Alice Grant, West Frankfort High School, chair-  
man

Dr. E. H. Mellon, Superintendent of Champaign  
High Schools

Robert Ring, Office of Superintendent of Public  
Instruction

### Teacher-Pupil Planning

Alice Baum, Oak Park, Illinois

Florence Diers, Pekin High School

Hila Stone, Franklin Park, Ill., chairman

### Ideal English Classroom

Harold J. Perry, Highland Park High School

Ruth Stickle, Leyden Community High School,  
Franklin Park, Illinois

S. B. Sullivan, DeKalb High School, chairman

### 12:00 Luncheon Meeting

Address: Professor Walter Havighurst, Professor  
of English, Miami University